

**LABOR MANAGEMENT**

By Julie Suarez and Tonya Van Slyke

Joint perspective  
on immigration  
proposals

# NYFB and NEDPA Team Up for Immigration Reform

New York Farm Bureau (NYFB) and Northeast Dairy Producers Association (NEDPA) have joined advocacy efforts to address an issue that dairy farmers have regularly identified as one of their biggest barriers to growth. Our two organizations have partnered in ways, perhaps, not seen before to support political change to develop a stable, legal workforce in agriculture. The last few months have seen an amazing switch in the dialogue about immigration reform. It actually seems as if immigration reform might be accomplished.

Here's our perspective on current immigration reform proposals and action you can take:

## The Senate's Proposal

New York and Northeast agriculture is well positioned in the Senate side of the aisle, with NY's Senator Schumer chairing the Immigration Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee and keeping a close eye on agricultural immigration issues. California's Senator Feinstein has been tasked with coming up with the ag specific plan, which is due shortly. We are keeping a close eye on this with the concern that the Senator represents California agriculture, and as such has a significant union presence that she's trying to mitigate.

The outlined principles document put together by the Senate's Gang of Eight reflects an acknowledgement and an understanding of agriculture. While the proposal emphasizes border security and the need for employers to do more to verify workers, it also talks about providing a legitimate path to citizenship for people who work in agriculture and other industries. Importantly, it specifies the pathway for agriculture needs to be faster and easier, with an ongoing commitment by the worker to remain in agriculture. This leads the way, frankly, for a new pool of work-

ers, future partners and farm owners who have immigrant backgrounds. The Senate principles also contain a much-needed shout-out for an agricultural seasonal worker program that works. It stays silent on H2-A, but calls for a guest worker program that meets the needs of farmers. In our opinion, the Senate principles document is realistic for agriculture. Whether it remains so after the drafting process is something we will monitor carefully.

## President Obama's Proposal

Farmers and those of us involved in Northeast Agriculture should be concerned about President Obama's proposal, as it emphasizes the need for complete border security prior to true immigration reform. And, from a business-based perspective, only talks about the high tech sector. While the high tech sector of the economy is certainly important, a country that can't feed itself will have even more problems. The President has not presented his principles in a bill format, so the details are incomplete, but it seems that a temporary agricultural program will not be forthcoming. The President appears to take the position, fostered by the US Department of Labor, that H2-A works. It is our position that H2-A will not work for the long-term needs of the dairy farmers in NY and the Northeast.

## The House of Representatives' Proposal

The outlook for immigration reform is a lot more complicated in the House of Representatives. If the Speaker moves away from the principle of needing unanimous, or at least majority consent of House Republicans, before putting issues up for a vote, immigration reform may have a realistic shot at getting passed, even with continued controversy about comprehensive reform. Rumors of another

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## FYI

■ **Tonya Van Slyke** is Executive Director for Northeast Dairy Producers Association. Reach her at [tonya@nedpa.org](mailto:tonya@nedpa.org). Julie Suarez is the Director of Public Policy for NY Farm Bureau. Reach her at [jsuarez@nyfb.org](mailto:jsuarez@nyfb.org).



**THE MANAGER**

**4** Listen – Listening is perhaps the most important aspect of communication for a manager or supervisor. Effective managers make it clear that they want their employees' feedback and that their comments about the workplace and job performance are welcome any time. Employees often have suggestions about how work can be performed more effectively and those suggestions should be heard and considered by managers and supervisors. Effective managers recognize that no one knows more about a job and the challenges of doing a job than the individual who performs that job every day.

Listening is an important way to show respect for employees' contributions, abilities and ideas. Managers who put priority on taking the time to listen are more likely to identify improvements in job design and performance and earn the respect of those they supervise.

**5** Provide training and development opportunities – Generally speaking, people want to improve their performance and want to become more competent than they are today. They want to grow, learn and become more valuable to themselves as well as to a current or future employer. In addition, employees enjoy doing what they do well. An ongoing process of training and development for each employee will reap big dividends.

Training can be conducted internally or off-site. Many effective dairy managers have made very good use of video tapes and other teaching materials at the workplace to give employees the skills they need to do a job effectively. Regardless of how training is done, it is important to reinforce training on the job on a daily and weekly basis, until the employee has mastered a particular skill.

Some managers fail to get the best results from their training dollars because there is no follow-up to reinforce training. This is especially true of off-site training.

If you send an employee to a class or seminar off the farm, be sure to that a manager or supervisor meets with the person following the training to discuss what was taught and how it can be implemented on the job.

**6** View your compensation package as a total reward system – Nonmonetary compensation includes benefits that do not have tangible value: job security, flexible hours, opportunity for growth, recognition and friendship. Monetary compensation includes wages and benefits such as insurance, retirement programs and paid leave.

The challenge for any manager is to develop the right combination of monetary and nonmonetary forms of compensation to create an environment where employees are motivated to stay. Selecting the compensation elements that motivate employees and provide an attractive work environment is the key to build loyalty and retain the best employees.

A stable work environment, with low turnover, benefits the manager and the organization and lowers the direct costs of filling positions. Employers who are constantly listening and trying to meet the needs of their employees will gain the loyalty of their work force. They will ultimately lower their turnover costs and create the opportunity to build a productive and satisfied work force over the long-term. □

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“gang” in the House exist. The real leader in the House will be Representative Goodlatte, from West Virginia, who participated in a NY House Agriculture Committee field hearing on the Farm Bill last year. At that Farm Bill meeting he heard from dairy and fruit farmers about the importance of immigration reform as one of their first priorities. The recent hearing by the House Judiciary Committee featured AFBF President Bob Stallman who articulated the need for a temporary worker program that works for full-time, year-round agriculture, as well as an adjustment of the visa and/or document status of workers already in this country. In the House, the focus is on coming up with appropriate single sector solutions independently, rather than folding them all together in one comprehensive bill. The challenge will be to merge the Senate and House efforts into one bill that can pass in each branch of the Legislature.

#### Joint Advocacy Efforts

NYFB and NEDPA have sent a joint letter to the Northeast Congressional delegation emphasizing the need for immigration reform NOW. “We can’t afford to wait any longer,” was the main message of the letter, which was signed by over 60 agricultural organizations and interested parties, including the major Northeast dairy cooperatives and Farm Credit East. This letter formed the basis of a recent joint advocacy trip to Washington, DC and will be featured in subsequent meetings. Both of our organizations are in the middle of

planning for additional lobby trips as needed, depending upon when the various immigration proposals enter bill format.

#### Have concerns about immigration audits?

A number of substantiated reports and a lot of rumors exist about the prevalence of ICE I-9 audits on farms. If you haven’t taken the time to make sure your documentation is complete, there’s no time to waste. President Obama has shown that he will continue to emphasize border security through employer/worksites enforcement. Audits and deportations are higher during his term than in the terms of any other President. A number of resources are available, including NEDPA and NYFB I-9 compliance webinars, available online in the member only section at [www.nyfb.org](http://www.nyfb.org). NYFB and NEDPA also both offer a labor compliance publication. It’s a good reminder of state and federal employment obligations at a time when inspectors are on farms more than ever.

#### Want to talk to your Congressional official about immigration?

Send an email through the NYFB advocacy site at [www.nyfb.org](http://www.nyfb.org) by clicking on the icon at the right side of the page. It’s more important than ever before for the agriculture community to remain united and advocate for immigration reform during each and every interaction with a member of Congress. If this is indeed our “one shot in a lifetime” at immigration reform, we need to keep the pressure up and work together. □